



Debating the Boundary

Key Question: What were the positions of the U.S. and Mexican President on the boundary of Texas in 1846?

Relevance to Student Knowledge:
All students have disagreed with a family member or friend.

Student Learning Objectives:
Students will be able to identify the positions of both the U.S. and Mexican Presidents during the U.S.-Mexican War.

TEKS

History: 7.4 (A, B) Identify individuals, events, and issues during the Mexican War

Social Studies Skills: 7.21 (E) Identify the elements of frame of reference that influenced the participants in an event

Language Arts: 7.5 (F) Clarify and support spoken ideas with evidence

Materials Included

- Teacher background information on U.S.-Mexican War and Battle of Palo Alto

Teacher-Supplied Materials

- None

BACKGROUND: THE U.S. IN 1835 - A NATION ON THE GO -

Over 60 years ago, the United States broke free from Britain and had grown into a strong, independent nation. Now, the U.S. was a nation on the go -always moving - and the population was growing rapidly. Many Americans felt they had a duty-a responsibility-to spread democracy, liberty, and progress to people everywhere. They believed that everyone everywhere should live life the American way. This idea that the U.S. should grow and spread democracy was known as Manifest Destiny.

MEXICO IN 1835 - A NATION IN TURMOIL - Only 15 years had passed since Mexico broke free from Spain. Since then, the government was unstable and had gone through 36 presidents. Unlike its neighbor to the north, the Mexican population was getting smaller. The Mexican government wanted people to settle the land. To do this, they granted land to Americans. To receive the land, the settlers had to promise to become Mexican citizens.

The U.S. settlers were very different from the Mexican citizens. The settlers spoke English, not Spanish and were unfamiliar with Mexican customs. Although slavery was illegal in Mexico, many settlers brought slaves with them. Furthermore, they believed in Manifest Destiny. As time went on, many felt they were not part of Mexico.

In 1835, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna was elected President of Mexico. Santa Anna threw out the Constitution and ruled as a dictator. The settlers, who believed in democracy, were furious and took action. The Texans ceded from Mexico and declared Texas an independent country. The Mexican government did not recognize Texas as an independent country. Texas was a rogue state and the land still belonged to Mexico. The Mexican Army was sent to restore order. During the Texas Revolution, the Texans and Mexican Army fought several battles, including the famous siege of the Alamo. At the Battle of San Jacinto, the Texans captured Mexico's leader, General Santa Anna. To gain his own freedom, Santa Anna signed two Treaties of Velasco - a public version and a secret version. The treaties granted the Texans independence and, in 1836, Texas became the Lone Star Republic.

The public treaty stated that Mexican troops would retreat south of the Rio Grande. But the secret treaty said that the Rio Grande would be the border between Texas and Mexico.

MANAGEMENT

1. Preview the activity.

Vocabulary

- Argument: **1** A reason for or against something; **2** A discussion in which arguments are presented (a debate)
- Persuasion: To the power or ability to persuade; To win over to a belief or course of action by argument or request
- Evidence: Material presented to a court to help find the truth in a matter; Proof

The Mexican government didn't agree to either treaty. Texas still belonged to Mexico and was not an independent republic.

Furthermore, Mexico stated that the border of Texas was farther north, along the Nueces River. The Treaties of Velasco were violated by both the United States and Mexico.

THE NEW U.S. PRESIDENT

Texas was a hot topic during the presidential election of 1844. James K. Polk promised that as President he would annex Texas. When he won, Congress acted and made Texas the 28th state.

How to annex Texas was another issue. At first, Polk tried diplomacy. He sent Congressman John Slidell to Mexico to **negotiate** with the new Mexican President, President Mariano Paredes. Slidell was to offer Mexico \$5 million for New Mexico, \$25 million for California if Mexico recognized the Rio Grande as the southern border of Texas.

Mexico did not recognize Texas as an independent nation and felt that the United States was trying to annex their land. They were insulted by Slidell's offer and refused to meet with him.

LESSON

Introduction

1. Divide the class into two groups.
2. Tell one group that they have to convince the other group that the most important school subject is math (or whatever subject you choose). They will have three minutes to develop their argument.
3. Tell one group that they have to convince the other group that the most important school subject is reading (or whatever subject you choose).
4. Tell both groups that they will have three minutes to develop an argument and one minute to present it.
5. Have a class discussion based on the following questions:
 - If someone disagrees with you, do you try to present your point of view?
 - How do other people (family, friends, people on TV) handle disagreements?

Guided Lesson

1. Define *argument* or have students look up the definition. Make sure students understand an argument is not just a fight but also a **justification** for an opinion or point-of-view.
2. Define *persuasion* or have students look up the definition. Make sure that understand that persuasion is based on your opinion or point of view.
3. As a class, brainstorm commercials that persuade people that their product is the best. List responses.
4. Define *evidence* or have students look up the definition.
5. Tell students that James Polk was the U.S. President and Mariano Arista the Mexican President during the U.S.-Mexican War. These Presidents disagreed on the boundary between Texas.
6. Tell students that President Polk claimed the Rio Grande was the boundary of Texas and President Arista said the boundary was further north at the Nueces River.

Discovery

1. Assign each student either the number one or two.
2. Have the “ones” move to one side of the room and the “twos” to the other side.
3. Tell students that they will pretend to lawyers for one of the Presidents. Their job is to persuade the opposing group by arguing their case.
4. Tell students the “ones” are lawyers for President Polk and the “twos” lawyers for President Paredes. (**Option:** Divide the “ones” and “twos” into smaller groups.)
5. Tell students that each group is to:
 - Develop a persuasive argument for their President’s position
 - Present evidence and proof either from the reading or other sources
6. When students are ready, conduct the debate in a “courtroom” format. Be sure to allow each group time to present and to respond.

Wrap- up Activities

1. Have students evaluate which group presented the strongest case. Evaluate for both:
 - Support by evidence
 - Most persuasive argument

Extension: Have a class discussion or have students write an essay on different ways that Presidents Polk and Paredes can settle their disagreement, including any possible compromises.

Student Evaluation/Assessment: As students present, determine if the argument is supported with facts and is persuasive.



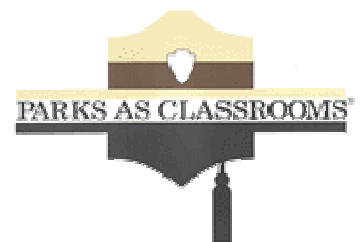
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The National Park Service cares for the
special places saved by the American people
so that all may experience our heritage.



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